

Message Text

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R 121810Z FEB 75

FM USMISSION NATO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0078

INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMCONGEN HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

USLO PEKING

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 USNATO 0776

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, NATO, CH, UR

SUBJ: SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS

REF: USNATO 0487 (NOTAL)

1. AT FEB 11 POLADS, BELGIAN REP (BOUCKAERT) CIRCULATED
BELGIAN ASSESSMENT OF SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS, MISSION'S INFORMAL
TRANSLATION OF WHICH FOLLOWS:

BEGIN TEXT:

CHINA: RELATIONS WITH THE USSR

1) THE APPARENT SERENITY WHICH THE CHINESE LEADERS ARE
DISPLAYING AT PRESENT WITH RESPECT TO THE SOVIET MILITARY THREAT
CONSTITUTES A MARKED CHANGE FROM THEIR PREVIOUS ATTITUDE. WITHOUT
GOING BACK TO THE BLOODY BORDER INCIDENTS OF 1969-1970 ONE RECALLS

THE DEEP CONCERN SHOWN BY THE PRC LEADERSHIP IN 1972 AND EVEN --
ALTHOUGH TO A LESSER DEGREE -- IN 1973.

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2) IT IS OBVIOUSLY IMPOSSIBLE TO JUDGE WHICH OF THESE
TWO OPPOSING ATTITUDES IS SINCERE OR AFFECTED; HOWEVER, IT
IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE TO DETECT ELEMENTS IN THE SITUATION WHICH MAY
HAVE HAD AN INFLUENCE ON THIS CHANGE IN BEHAVIOR.

3) TWO PRIMARY CONSIDERATIONS ARE USEFUL. FIRST OF ALL, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO JUDGE THE REAL CHARACTER AND THE PRECISE DEGREE OF THE SOVIET THREAT OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS. SECONDLY, EVERYTHING IN CHINA IS PART OF A WHOLE: THE ECONOMY, DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY, AND DEFENSE ARE PART OF AN ENSEMBLE AND THINGS SAID ABOUT ONE PROBLEM ARE OBVIOUSLY A FUNCTION OF AN OVERALL SYNTHESIS AND CALCULATED WITH A VIEW TOWARD A RESULT WHICH ISSOMETIMES AT ODDS WITH OUR LOGIC.

4) AMONG THE REASONS WHICH COULD HAVE MOVED THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP TO ANNOUNCE THE IMMINENCE OF THE SOVIET MILITARY THREAT IN 1969-1972 ONE CAN POINT TO:

A) REAL WORRY. AFTER ALL, BLOODSHED TOOK PLACE AND THE USSR PROCEEDED TO CONCENTRATE PROGRESSIVELY A MILLION MEN ON A PREVIOUSLY LIGHTLY DEFENDED FRONTIER. THE DETENTE CLEARLY SOUGHT BY THE USSR SINCE THE START OF MR. NIXON'S FIRST TERM, THE ARRANGEMENT ON BERLIN AND OSTPOLITIK COULD HAVE LEAD THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT TO BELIEVE THAT THE USSR WAS TRYING TO SETTLE ITS CONFLICTS WITH THE WEST TO FREE ITS HANDS IN THE EAST. THE SINOPHOBIC SENTIMENTS EXPRESSED BY SOVIET PUBLIC OPINION CONFIRMED SUCH AN IMPRESSION. DID THE USSR REALLY CONTEMPLATE A PREEMPTIVE ATTACK AGAINST THE EMERGING NUCLEAR ARSENAL OF CHINA? IT IS MORE LIKELY THAT THE SOVIETS SOUGHT, THROUGH MILITARY PRESSURE AND DELIBERATELY ALARMING STATEMENTS, TO BRING THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT TO A MORE CONCILIATORY ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE USSR.

B) THIS PERIOD WAS MARKED BY AN INTERNAL STRUGGLE AMONG CHINESE LEADERS AND CAME TO AN END WITH THE FALL OF LIN PIAO IN SEPTEMBER 1971. IN THE 1969-1971 DEBATE, IT IS LIKELY THAT LINPIAO WAS IN FAVOR OF CORRECT RELATIONS WITH THE USSR AND OPPOSED AN OPENING TOWARDS THE U.S. PUTTING THE SPOTLIGHT ON AN IMMEDIATE THREAT OF INVASION FROM THE SOVIETS WOULD ALLOW THE CHINESE TO PRESENT LIN PIAO AS A NATIONAL TRAITOR; IN VIEW OF THE INFLUENCE OF A MAN WHO HAD BEEN SEEN AS THE CONFIDENTIAL

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HEIR APPARENT, SUCH A WEIGHTY ARGUMENT COULD HAVE BEEN WELCOME.

C) FOR THE ADVOCATES OF AN OPENING TOWARD THE U.S., DRAMATIZATION OF THE SOVIET THREAT WOULD BE A LOGICAL ATTITUDE.

5) THE REASONS FOR THE CHANGE IN DIAGNOSIS, WHICH HAVE NOW LED PEKING TO MINIMIZE THE IMMINENCE OF A SOVIET MILITARY THREAT, COULD BE THE FOLLOWING:

A) A NEW EVALUATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION AND OF SOVIET INTENTIONS. DETENTE -- ALTHOUGH IT IS OFFICIALLY RIDICULED -- IS A FACT AND THE SOVIET UNION SEEMS TO COUNT MORE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ITS OVERALL POWER AND INFLUENCE

THAN ON MILITARY OPERATIONS TO ESTABLISH ITS WORLD HEGEMONY.
THE CHINESE NUCLEAR ARSENAL HAS BECOME A REALITY ALLOWING ITS
OWNERS A GREATER DEGREE OF CONFIDENCE IN THEMSELVES. FURTHER-
MORE, IT IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE THAT OVER THE LAST SEVERAL
YEARS THE POPULAR LIBERATION ARMY MAY HAVE ACQUIRED GREATER
CONFIDENCE IN ITS CAPACITY TO HANDLE LOCAL INCIDENTS ALONG
THE MOST SENSITIVE POINTS ALONG THE BORDER.

B) THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST CONFUCIUS AND LIN PIAO
CONCEALS, AMONG OTHER THINGS, A DEBATE ON STRATEGY BETWEEN
ADVOCATES OF CONSTANT RETREAT BY GUERILLAS (TODAY CONDEMNED
AS A LIN PIAO THEORY) AND ADVOCATES OF REGULAR AGGRESSIVE
ACTION, WHICH PERMITS STRIKING THE ENEMY AT HIS KEY POINTS
(WHICH IS IN LINE WITH CHAIRMAN MAO'S THOUGHT).

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 USNATO 0776

FOR THE ADVOCATES OF A "FORWARD DEFENSE", IT IS NATURALLY ADVANT-
AGEOUS TO DIMINISH THE IMMINENCE AND MAGNITUDE OF THE ADVERSARY'S
THREAT TO REASONABLE PROPOSITIONS, THUS MAKING SUCH A DEFENSE
CREDIBLE. MANCHURIA, BEING AT THE SAME TIME VITAL FOR CHINA
(IT REPRESENTS A SORT OF RUHR FOR CHINA) AND GEOGRAPHICALLY
VERY VULNERABLE, THIS STRATEGIC DEBATE TAKES ON GREAT
IMPORTANCE FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF DEFENSE AS WELL AS FOR
ECONOMIC PLANNING.

C) THE STATUS OF THE ARMY VIS-A-VIS CIVILIAN AUTHORITY
IS RELEVANT TO THIS DEBATE. IF, AS IS LIKELY, THE
CAMPAIGN AGAINST CONFUCIUS AND LIN PIAO AIMS IN PART AT A
REDUCTION OF THE AUTONOMOUS INFLUENCE OF REGIONAL MILITARY
COMMANDERS WHO HAD AN EXCESSIVE BELIEF THAT THE CULTURAL

REVOLUTION HAD COME TO AN END, IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THE EXISTENCE OF A PRECISE INVASION THREAT MUST BE MINIMIZED. THE EMPHASIS PLACED ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL MILITIAS, WHICH HENCEFORTH HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE LIGHTLY ARMED, DEPRIVES THE ARMY OF ITS MONOPOLY ON INTERVENTION IN CASE OF DISORDERS.

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D) THE PREPARATION OF THE FOURTH FIVE-YEAR PLAN IS STILL UNDERWAY (DESPITE A TWO-YEAR DELAY). DURING SUCH PREPARATION, THE DEGREE OF ECONOMIC PRIORITY TO BE GIVEN TO ARMS NATURALLY TAKES ON MAJOR IMPORTANCE. PEKING SEEMS TO BE MOVING TOWARD A REDUCTION OF MILITARY SPENDING. REDUCING THE SOVIET THREAT TO MODEST PROPORTIONS -- AT LEAST IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE -- BECOMES LOGICAL IN THIS CONTEXT.

E) PEKING'S ASSESSMENT OF THE RESULTS OF ITS OPENING TOWARDS THE U.S. PROBABLY ALSO PLAYS A ROLE IN THIS REGARD. UNDER SUCH A HYPOTHESIS, A CALM ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE SOVIET THREAT CAN BE USEFUL IN SIGNALING TO THE U.S. THAT CHINA IS NOT ABSOLUTELY DEPENDENT ON AMERICAN HELP.

F) AN ANALOGOUS VIEW CAN BE APPLIED TO EUROPE. TO THE DEGREE THAT CHINA HOPES TO SEE THE EUROPEANS CONTRIBUTE MORE TOWARD BALANCING SOVIET POWER, IT IS IN CHINA'S INTEREST TO EMPHASIZE THE THREAT TO THE WEST RATHER THAN TO THE EAST.

G) FINALLY, TO MOBILIZE THE THIRD WORLD AGAINST THE "SUPERPOWERS" AND PARTICULARLY AGAINST SOVIET INFLUENCE, IT IS ALSO NECESSARY TO PRESENT THE USSR'S THREAT AS A WORLDWIDE ONE: CHINA'S MANY WARNINGS BECOME MORE DISINTERESTED AND MORE CONVINCING IF CHINA ITSELF IS NOT THE OBJECT OF AN IMMEDIATE THREAT.

6) FROM THE ABOVE, IT APPEARS THAT THE NEW ATTITUDE OF THE CHINESE LEADERS DOES NOT AT ALL IMPLY A MORE FAVORABLE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE USSR. ANY MEETING WITH FOREIGN DELEGATIONS AND ANY STATEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL FORA CONTAIN A CHINESE WARNING -- GENERALLY A SHARP ONE -- AGAINST SOVIET "SOCIAL IMPERIALISM". UNDER PRESENT CHINESE DIPLOMATIC DOCTRINE, THE CAPITALIST WORLD IS IN A PERIOD OF GRAVE CRISIS, BOTH POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY, AND THE DANGER OF HEGEMONY STEMS PRIMARILY FROM THE GROWING AND AMBITIOUS POWER OF THE USSR.

A) THIS ASSESSMENT UNDOUBTEDLY CONTAINS CONSIDERABLE SINCERITY: IT IS NOT BASED ONLY ON FACTS, BUT ALSO ON MARXIST ANALYSIS WHICH FORESEES CAPITALISM ENDING IN DISASTER, AN ANALYSIS WHICH DOES NOT PRESENT EQUALLY REASSURING PROSPECTS VIS-A-VIS "SOVIAL IMPERIALISM", WHICH HAS BORROWED ENOUGH
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ELEMENTS FROM SCIENTIFIC MATERIALISM TO ENSURE ITS SURVIVAL
AND ITS POWER.

B) AT THE ORIGIN OF THE SINO-SOVIET CONFRONTATION,
THERE ARE OBVIOUSLY HISTORICAL AND GEOPOLITICAL REASONS: THE
TWO COUNTRIES ARE SEPARATED BY A LONG AND GENERALLY
UNDER-POPULATED BORDER, WHICH IS DIFFICULT TO DEFINE AND TO
DEFEND. CHINA REMEMBERS THE "UNEQUAL TREATIES" AS WELL AS THE
USSR'S HASTE IN CONCLUDING A BORDER TREATY WITH THE
KUOMINTANG IN 1945. THE RIVALRY OF THE TWO CONTINENTAL POWERS
IN ASIA IS OBVIOUSLY PART OF THE LOGIC OF HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY.

C) THERE ARE ALSO PERSONAL AND IDEOLOGICAL REASONS.
SOVIET RECOGNITION OF THE ORIGINALITY OF A "CHINESE PATH TO
SOCIALISM" WOULD HAVE GIVEN BLESSING TO THE IDEA OF
POLYCENTRISM AMONG SOCIALIST COUNTRIES. MOSCOW'S REJECTION
OF THIS, FOLLOWED SEVERAL YEARS LATER BY THE INVASION OF
CZECHOSLOVAKIA (1968) AND THE BREZHNEV DOCTRINE, HAVE CONVINCED
THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP OF THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF A PARTNERSHIP
BETWEEN EQUALS.

7) THIS ANALYSIS CLEARLY INDICATES THAT RAPPROACHMENT IS
NOT IN THE CARDS FOR TOMORROW. CHINA WILL CERTAINLY HAVE AN
INTEREST IN TIME IN ACHIEVING GREATER FLEXIBILITY IN ITS
RELATIONS WITH THE USSR SO AS TO HAVE MORE ROOM FOR DIPLOMATIC
MANEUVER. HOWEVER, THE COMMON HERITAGE OF THE TWO REGIMES
CONTRIBUTES AN ADDITIONAL DIFFICULTY TO A STATE OF NATURALLY
COMPETITIVE RELATIONS. ANY DISPUTE IS INEVITABLY RAISED TO
THE LEVEL OF IDEOLOGY AND THUS TOUCHES ON THE DOMESTIC POLITICS
OF EACH OF THE TWO COUNTRIES.
END TEXT.BRUCE

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